

# Tidy Towns Competition 2012

## *Adjudication Report*

Centre: **Strokestown** Ref: **715**  
County: **Roscommon** Mark: **225**  
Category: **B** Date(s): **05/07/2012**

	<b>Maximum Mark</b>	<b>Mark Awarded 2011</b>	<b>Mark Awarded 2012</b>
Overall Development Approach	50	30	31
The Built Environment	50	29	30
Landscaping	50	28	30
Wildlife and Natural Amenities	50	18	19
Litter Control	50	26	25
Tidiness	30	16	16
Waste Minimisation	20	11	12
Residential Areas	40	25	26
Roads, Streets and Back Areas	50	29	29
General Impression	10	6	7
<b>TOTAL MARK</b>	<b>400</b>	<b>218</b>	<b>225</b>

### **Overall Development Approach:**

Strokestown is very welcome to the SuperValu National Tidy Towns competition 2012. You have an average of eight people on your committee. We do not know how often you hold meetings, as you state that you hold them on an 'ad hoc' basis. We are delighted that you see signs of an increase in interest in the work of the committee in the community. We are glad that you have Roscommon County Council and TÚS workers helping you. Do you have any other support from other agencies and bodies? We realise that you could do with more local involvement. We are glad that you find the competition useful in that it rewards efforts being made to improve the local environment. You have various festivals during the year, and this must bring a lot of life to the village/town.

You use the church bulletin to communicate. We hope that you circulate all denominational churches in your area. You also use the local radio and press. Have you considered setting up a web or Facebook page in order to engage with the younger generation? You engage with the schools with regard to litter collections and with regard to the National Spring Clean campaign.

You are concerned about derelict buildings in the village. We understand that you are in negotiations with Roscommon County Council in relation to this issue. You will appreciate the lack of funding and staffing in the local authority throughout the country at present. So it is difficult for them to be as effective as they might otherwise be in this area at present. But it is good that this process has started. Strokestown is a very important village from an architectural point of view, and we would like to see a solution which would involve as much conservation as possible to the important streetscape.

Well done to the children at St Mary's primary school for their Green Flag. Well done also to the children of the school on Bridge Street for their Green Flag. There were two empty flagpoles also at this school.

Thank you for your map. However you did not name all approach roads nor housing estates on this map. Nor did you name the streets in the village/town. Please ensure that the map is up-to-date with all streets, approach roads, and housing estate named in your map next year. If we have misnamed any area please understand why – although we checked 'google' maps to fill in the gaps in your map. Also you entered the competition under the 'village' heading. We are unsure as to whether you call Strokestown locally a village or a town. We will use the 'village' word from here on in the report because of your category heading only. We hope that this is all right with you.

Last year's adjudicator reported on 'the absence of a planned work programme and encouraged you to submit one with each year's application in the competition as it is difficult to make substantial progress without one.' Unfortunately we do not appear to have received a plan in 2012 either. This is an important project which you should give time to. A three or five-year plan will focus your mind on the important issues facing you, and it will help you to prioritise your work. A plan need not be prepared professionally, but you should consult widely locally in preparing such a plan. You should also consider any statutory and non-statutory plans applicable to your village in drawing up your work programme. It is difficult to advance in this category in the absence of such a plan. Please do refer to the Tidy Towns Handbook for advice in relation to the preparation of a three or five-year plan.

Thank you for the photographs and the drawing you sent us of the work at the Grotto area. These are being returned safely to you with all the rest of your submission

### **The Built Environment:**

Strokestown is an excellent example of an Irish style Georgian small town. The built environment of Strokestown is very beautiful, but also very much in need of resuscitation. We were sad to see that so many properties in wonderful Church Street had fallen into such disrepair and states of neglect. You do not mention anything about the Strokestown Local Area Plan (LAP) which was made on 22 March 2010. We sourced this plan online ourselves. It is important that the Tidy Towns group take cognisance of and dovetail with the policies and proposals contained in the plan. We read in this Plan that an Architectural Conservation Area (ACA) was designated for part of the town in the previous LAP for Strokestown. We are delighted to read that the 2010 plan extended the ACA boundaries to include much of the core of the town - where there are many historic buildings which were added over time to the town. As the plan so rightly states 'not all of these buildings merit individual protection as protected structures but' - and this 'but' is important - 'as a group they are significant and their retention is important to the character of the town.' Were you involved in the consultation process in the making of this plan? You know that your town was planned around Strokestown Park House, the owners of which wished to create the widest main street in Europe 'on an axis which extends from the gates of the house to what is now St John's Heritage centre.' We would strongly advise you to discuss the future of the built environment in its broadest context – and not just in relation to derelict structures – with the Architectural Conservation Officer of your local authority or / and with the Architectural Officer of The Heritage Council. Have you investigated the possibility of grant aid for your buildings at risk which all contribute to the ACA? Have you considered applying for funding to Fáilte Ireland for instance - or to LEADER. Strokestown House and the genealogical centre are two of the more important tourist attractions in County Roscommon and it would be a shame if the architectural integrity of the town - which the house originally generated - were lost. It would also be a shame that local investment which retained the House for the town did not have follow up in the community. LEADER has a function now with regard to architectural heritage and tourism in rural areas. The first thing that you might attempt is to obtain funding for an up-to-date architectural conservation plan for your village/town. Due to the present economic climate, investment of a large nature is unlikely to occur. What you can best achieve, is firstly to prepare for the future through the preparation of an architectural conservation plan, and secondly to provide insofar as it is possible for the maintenance of the status quo that now exists before you lose any more of your very important built heritage. We will need to see evidence of concern in this area generally in next year's application – not just a concern with derelict structures – which is just a part of the entire issue. Please let us see some progress in this area before it is too late. We realise that this is a large undertaking. But all great oak trees start out as acorns. Very many towns and villages across Ireland would envy the heritage you have inherited, and are trying to 'invent resources' where they do not have them though nature or history. Do try to build on what you have, and make this a priority.

The railings outside the Church of Ireland – now St .John's Heritage Centre are extremely rusty. These are very fine examples of ironmongery of their period, and are very worth conserving. Please let us know next year if you have had any success on this issue. You could also look at other examples of ironmongery

throughout the streets - such as other railings and window guards at ground floor level. Do not be tempted to replace them with modern wrought iron railings which do not match at all the period of the building in question. They just need some repair. May we also suggest that you remove the container plants from the front of this site to a more needy location? Modern composite materials forming planters are not an appropriate embellishment for such an elegant building. The church does not need ornamentation other than the lovely landscaping, stonework and railings which surround it. Look after what you have before you add decorations.

Because of the number of interesting buildings in Strokestown, and because of the architectural qualities of many of these, it would be too lengthy to list and detail all our observations in this report. However we will reference a few as examples.

Across the road from here a two-storey house and elongated boundary wall would benefit from painting, but also from the trimming of the wild garden area between the property and the stonewall fronting the entrance to the Church Street. We noted interesting double gates here which would benefit from repair and painting.

Last year's adjudicator said that the old Health Centre premises could be improved. It has actually obviously disimproved. You have not indicated that you have approached the HSE to see about this issue. Have you done so and can you let us know what the situation is for next year?

We visited the site of the extension, refurbishment and PE facility at Scoil Mhuire and this is a work-in-progress. We have high hopes that it will add considerably to the built environment of the village/town. We also noted the new HSE Primary Community and Continuing Care services building – which is another example of good modern architecture in your built environment. This building was also very beautifully landscaped.

The Strokestown Community and Sports centre is a most bleak looking building in a 'sea' of car parking. We would very much like to see a landscaping plan submitted for this area, which would obviously include the parking requirements of the centre. Likewise the Strokestown GAA club premises would benefit from a landscaping plan to include marked parking spaces. The building itself is clean but the surrounding block wall should be plastered.

We admired the stonework in the area of the church and school/convent. This premises appears not to be in use any more as a convent, and appears to be unoccupied. What are the plans for its future?

The Courthouse is a potentially fine building, but needs some conservation. Outside it we noticed a small empty metal circular hole in the footpath with stones and cigarette butts inside. We admired a very nice limestone plaque attached to the courthouse, and we admired the very well presented grey and white single and two-storey houses along the street downhill of the Courthouse with the arched carriage entrance. The house with the creeper and the window boxes and bright red door looked extremely well, and here we noticed another lovely limestone plaque which states that these are two examples of provincial late Georgian architecture. Well done on these simple elegant plaques that you erected in 2000.

We admired the Banks on the south side of Church Street which are both Protected Structures. If you look at your Local Area Plan and read the section on the built environment it will inform you further about your built heritage. You could also refer to the National Inventory of Architectural Heritage which will detail further for you all your buildings of interest architecturally.

The Weigh-House area and Weighbridge area looked extremely sad and neglected. This would be a small project to begin with – perhaps you can consider this for next year, taking appropriate advice.

We would particularly like to commend the owners/occupiers of the Post Office on Elphin Street. This is a most magnificently presented property in every aspect. It shows elegance, restraint, and extreme care. The delightful Georgian paned windows were still intact, and the post office part of the premises was plain, simple, classical, and elegant. Do look at this carefully and see what you can achieve. If we had a prize to award we would give it to this building owner - but unfortunately we do not have! We particularly admired the delightful doorway with the elegant limestone door case. The limestone plaque -one of the series - was also admired and read with interest.

Elphin Street has some fine three-storey terraced buildings. However, the signage on the gable end of the end house at a street junction is untidy. We spotted a beautifully gleaming white house with nice railings and front boundary pillars, together with a nice black gate.

The Spar shop is to be complimented hugely on retaining the traditional frontage – although PVC windows have unfortunately been added. Yet it is a tribute to the owners/occupiers that they have not gone the brash modern supermarket look route. We think it would look even better if there were a few less attachments to the front elevation at all levels. Nonetheless the delightful painting in contrasting colours and the terrific

maintenance are very praiseworthy. Beside this the ivy clad/Virginia creeper clad house was also admired. Some wonderful railings on an unusual building approaching the gates to Strokestown House – together with its stone portico and first-floor semi-octagonal balcony were admired. The jostle stones at the corners of this property were also admired.

The entrance Gates and surrounding beautiful buildings and nice metalwork gates in the immediate area of the entrance to Strokestown house are a huge asset to the village/town.

Strokestown Community Development Association's building was neatly presented. Dockery's is a well presented building with little fuss attached to its front elevation. Lettering was missing from the McAuliffe pharmacy sign.

Bridge St. is a nice vernacular street which was generally presented in a positive fashion. The stone two-storey pub on bridge Street was admired. The Hotel was neat.

The number of properties that are 'for sale' and have signage attached and deteriorating frontages in the village is high in number. Whereas you have made an attempt in the past to deal with the facade of derelict properties – for example the cream building where you have painted curtains on the first floor level – these properties appear to have deteriorated further, as unfortunately have your improvements.

The fire station was well presented and had some nice trees planted nearby. We very much like your limestone edging to the footpaths along Church Street. The parking arrangements are so 'free' within Church Street that the haphazard nature of the parking detracts from the built environment.

You have worked on the old water pump feature at the junction of the Roscommon/Longford roads. However this appears to be incomplete as the surfacing around the pump has not been finished. We admired the stone wall surrounds and the floral planting on either side. We would suggest removal of the black plastic floral container which almost obscures the pump, and is out of character with the good-quality ironmongery of the pumps features.

### **Landscaping:**

We were very impressed with the planting and the stonework in the area containing the grotto. Well done on the nice raised stone flower bed and the nesting boxes/feeding tables here. This is a lovely feature on one's approach from the Longford side. We notice that this work is almost complete, but there are still some remaining tidying jobs around the stone entrance to be completed. The grass was very well mown and the entire area looked lovely along the banks of the small river. The delightful stone arched bridge reflected in the adjacent stream looked well. We admired the rear of the grotto which is lovely stone work, and is elegant in its simplicity. The Memorial to Percy French would benefit from cleaning. But this should be done by a stonemason and should not be power washed.

Well done on your lovely landscaping of the roundabout at the bottom of church Street. Whereas we have reservations about a roundabout in such a wonderfully architecturally intact area. we appreciate the fact that as the main N5 goes through the town this appears to be necessary pro tem. The landscaping looked really well and we compliment you on your achievements here, with the lovely hard and soft landscaping and its semi- mature tree planting and flower beds.

We would suggest that you replace the floral containers on the footpaths at the bottom of church Street. These composite modern fake classical containers add nothing to the streetscape. We would prefer to see planting made in the soil which is sustainable also. But where you want to use containers – as here where there is no soil available on wide pavement - do choose more appropriate containers. Do try to remember that native trees and shrubs will give you a lot more value and less maintenance than floral annuals. That is not to say that the floral displays should not also be provided, as they do lift an area visually where needed, and provide colour. But their location and their containers should be wisely and appropriately chosen.

We admired the flower beds on the approach roads.

### **Wildlife and Natural Amenities:**

Well done on the installation of birds nesting boxes and tables at the grotto area. We note that you intend to

plant wildflowers at this space also. Be careful with the wildflower selection which you purchase – that it is truly consisting of native Irish wild flowers and is of good quality.

On the Elphin approach we noted evidence of relatively recent hedge cutting. Remember that it is permissible to trim hedging along cultivated ground (e.g. gardens) throughout the year. However with regard to hedge trimming, you are reminded that it is an offence under the Wildlife Act 1976 and Wildlife (Amendment) Act 2006 to cut vegetation in a hedge or ditch on lands not cultivated between 1st March and 31st August annually - this is for the protection of nesting birds. Please be careful of this in future years. Get your hedge trimming complete by the end of February, and, even if you feel there are some straggly bits of hedges bounding uncultivated ground (fields) don't be tempted to tidy them after March 1st!

You spray weed growth on the pavement and on the approach roads. We would suggest that you might consider using manual weed removal methods or investigate organic weed removal methods. Spraying chemicals is not good for the environment. You could discuss this with your County Heritage Officer.

Roscommon County Council in association with The Heritage Council has published some wonderful literature on the biodiversity of County Roscommon. We recommend that you discuss the potential of your area in this regard with the County Heritage Officer also. In the meantime perhaps there are some students in the school who would be interested in carrying out some survey work on the wildlife to be found in Strokestown. Or perhaps you may have a student studying at third level from the area who would be interested in carrying out some research for your village. However you approach it - is very important that you endeavour to move forward in this category in an overall fashion.

### **Litter Control:**

The bring bank area was unfortunately very untidy. We found a number of cardboard boxes and a full black sack, together with assorted bottle tops and other small items of litter between the receptacles. The County Council sign above the banks is obliterated in places by tree growth. The purple clothes bank has a very rusty 'square' beside the white signage. We saw another black sack left beside a black corrugated gate near the purple clothes bank. The 'keep Strokestown litter free' sign would be very difficult for anybody to see, as it is located on a wall behind the purple clothes bank. In this space we also noted some litter. We are unsure as to how suitable the siting of the bring banks in this area of important Church Street is. Would there be a more suitable location available?

On the Tulsk approach there was quite an amount of litter strung along the road margin opposite the Green planted post and wire area near the depot.

Some litter was noted along the kerb edge in Elphin Street. There was a litter bin beside one of the coral coloured buildings on Church Street which was absolutely full and overflowing onto the footpath between the bin and adjacent small substation. A full litter bin was noted on the other side of the street as one descends towards the roundabout.

You are continuing with your regular litter picking around the town. You intend to obtain and erect anti litter signage on approach roads. Do not erect too many signs as a proliferation of signage can look untidy.

It is important also that you consider a Litter Control Plan. This should form part of your 3 or 5 year plan. This need not be a complicated plan, but should involve working jointly with your local authority's Environment Section. You should consult the "The Roscommon Litter Management Plan 2011- 2014". This will give you lots of ideas and suggest ways where you can dovetail your projects with that Plan. Such forward planning will give you an additional advantage in this area also.

### **Tidiness:**

The garage premises at the top of the Church Street is a very poor introduction to the views ahead as it is totally unscreened and untidy. We would like very much to see if you can negotiate some improvement on this situation with the owners/occupiers. We noticed some rusty barrels and some county council signage 'Road flooded' around this area behind a grey shed and orange container.

An extremely poor litter bin was noted close to St John's Heritage Centre. As this is an important location for a visitor this should be immediately attended to. At this point we also noted a rusting sewer vent pipe. This should be painted. In this location also was a faded Slí na Sláinte sign and underneath the sign were two

pieces of unrelated stone. The Church Street bilingual sign was broken and half of it was missing in this area also. This is a shame as it is on a lovely stone wall with overhanging foliage. Across the road a freshly painted blue redundant sign pole against the stone wall on the L1421 junction did not appear to have a use - as yet in any event.

Near the new school we saw a planning site notice for Scoil Mhuire which is very dirty and appears to be very much out of date – dated June 2008. This should be removed.

It is good that you are having summer soccer schools. It is a pity that the site chosen to erect the banner for this year was on a very old dirty tower.

In Church Street derelict or deteriorating properties look poorly. A large trailer was parked beside one of the 'treed' islands. We hope this is not a permanent fixture.

Church Street was well weeded along the kerbs. Well done on this. A rusty B&B sign was noted on Church Street. In general projecting signage was not a major issue in Church Street. However it becomes an issue elsewhere within the town – especially in Elphin Street. This needs rationalisation. The Library building was neat and well painted, but across the road the building for sale - with its maroon colour ground floor frontage - looked quite derelict on a visually strategic corner.

It is always untidy and unseasonal to see Christmas lights in place in June and July. We noted a full display of Christmas lights above a bar. But we also noticed a 'for sale sign attached to the adjoining premises brackets (or this premises)? We are unsure which is for sale. Can you negotiate with the owner to take these down and to erect them only at Christmas time? We understand why people leave these signs in situ, but this is not acceptable from a tidiness point of view.

Last year's adjudicator mentioned said that the mushrooms premises looked very bad on adjudication day and had too many signs. However on adjudication day this premises looked completely abandoned. Signage appears to have been removed. But the overall front elevation was very badly in need of painting and the curtilage in need of tidying. The lovely lines stone sign for the old ballroom is 'lost' here and deserves better surrounds.

There was some weed removal necessary along the kerbing near the fire station. A small amount of fly posting was noted on adjudication day. This is however not a major problem.

### **Waste Minimisation:**

You took part in the National Spring Clean campaign You hope to obtain facilities for recycling of paper and grass cuttings and you took part in the we the cycling electrical waste recycling day. However waste minimisation is about a lot more. Waste minimisation involves the prevention of waste accumulation in the first case. It is really what it says – to minimise on waste production before we, as a community, private or public create it. You could increase your marks considerably in this section. We would encourage you to refer to the Tidy Towns Handbook's advice in relation to waste minimisation. The Environment section of your local authority, Roscommon County Council could certainly help you to move forward in relation to this category. It would be a good idea to consider hosting a waste minimisation seminar for the community. You might even consider conducting an audit of the waste produced in the village with a view to considering how it can be reduced. We noted solar panels on Strokestown GAA new clubhouse.

### **Residential Areas:**

As a lot of the village is residential the problem of the lack of house occupancy and its maintenance consequences are significant within the old village structure. However most of the occupied houses are well presented.

We admired the shrubs at the entrance to the Maples, but it is hard to read the sign for The Maples. We admired the planted bicycles. We noted empty flagpoles here also.

The estate opposite The Maples – this appears to be Lisnaree on your map requires screening of the unfinished part of the estate. A name sign identifying the estate should be provided. There was a nice boulder to an estate. But this has not been engraved.

Shevlin Court was neatly presented.

You have worked to improve the appearance of housing estates, and you hope to extend this to other estates. We notice that Killdalloge Heights won Roscommon County Council's Tidy Estates Award in 2009.

The Crescent is leafy. Forge Hill needs grass cut and one particular garden was very weedy. There was overgrown open space at Park Court behind Centra. Park Court also has a very weedy entrance approach and the auctioneering signs look very untidy along the approach boundary wall.

Some unfinished bungalow type estate housing which requires screening was noticed at the edge of the village. This has overgrown grounds and old containers are located nearby.

### **Roads, Streets and Back Areas:**

On the Tusk approach the sign for Strokestown was buried in growth on adjudication day. The chain and link green island space at a minor road junction generally needs an overall, including the security fencing around the depot on the right-hand side. A double poled sign on the green island area needs the rear of the sign improved. You have replanted some flower beds here. The grass on the green islands had been trimmed, but the general impression of this island area is detracted from by the very weedy and grassy edges to the depot area straddling the minor road. The security fencing at this depot has landscaping facing the main road, but the gates area could be a solid gate and walled splayed areas to provide a screen to the storage inside. Along the minor road the screening is ineffective as it consists of – although pretty – ineffective from the screening point of view - marigolds along the edge of the security fencing. On this road a County Council sign 'no camping/ overnight parking' was rusty. The large auctioneering hoarding at The Maples looks poorly. There appeared to be no trimming inside the 50 kph speed limit sign on the right-hand side approach in the village. On the left-hand side the suburban housing was well presented. There is a nice view of the spire of the Church of Ireland – St John's Heritage Centre –on this approach. Rusty gates and an over grown access splay to lands on the right-hand side looked poorly.

We noticed some a bent and dirty road sign close to Killdalloge Heights.

On the Elphin Road we noted some hedge cutting which appeared to be recent. Please refer to our comments under the Wildlife and Amenities above in relation to hedge cutting. We also noted two headless road signs and rusty overgrown gates. On this approach we could not read the symbols on the lower part of the generic County Roscommon village name sign for Strokestown as grass growth on the bank beside was obliterating it. We noticed a hoarding for a local business also. This detracts from the rural approach. The paths were weed-free in Elphin Street

On the Dublin approach we admired the nice planting at the turn in the road but there are lots of advertising signs in the margins on the final approaches to the town opposite the Scania garage. We note that you plan to remove unnecessary signage from the approach roads. Scania needs improvement of its bed area in front, and would benefit from screening behind the fence if possible. The Esso Scania garage was presented in a neat fashion but had a lot of small advertising signs on its forecourt. The Strokestown Tyre Company signage detracts from the large modern glazed building fronting the approach from Longford. In the area of the junction at the Esso garage sign there is some rough unfinished edging to the roadside. We noticed some nice green field gates here between two stone pillars which were well painted, but required repair, and the high grasses on either side of the gateway needed trimming. Advertising signing for Strokestown Park coach entrance needs renewal to a more tasteful display for what it is advertising.

You are liaising with the residents of housing estates to help you with the litter enhancement aspect of roads streets and back areas. We admired the flower beds on the approach roads.

Footpaths surfacing outside St John's Heritage Centre required attention.

The L1421 is a tidy approach to Strokestown generally.

Some traffic signage near the roundabout such as the yellow/ white and blue arrow sign on the island at the bottom of Elphin Street needs cleaning.

There were two road signs at the Drumsna junction. But as well as these there was there an official sign for Kiltrustan church and for Coonahee fishing. However, as well as these official signs, there were six other signs

which were all unofficial. These looked very untidy and they are beside a lovely stone set of steps leading to a field at a higher-level.. We admired the landscaping in the stone circular beds on the lovely landscaped area at the Boyle road junction. Once again there are two road poles here with five town/village mileage distance signs. Perhaps these could be amalgamated?

**General Impression:**

Strokestown has a great built heritage and it is a lovely place to visit. We know that you have a lot of work ahead of you. But you are interested in improving the quality of life and the environment for your village/town. We hope that you get the help that you need in the coming years and that you can see a growth in the people in the community who are willing to become involved. Go n-eirí libh!